

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA**

**Case No. 1:25-cv-20696**

**PUROAST COFFEE COMPANY, INC.**

**JURY TRIAL DEMANDED**

Plaintiff,

**INJUNCTIVE RELIEF SOUGHT**

v.

**TRADER JOE’S COMPANY,**

Defendant.

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**COMPLAINT**

Plaintiff, Puroast Coffee Company, Inc. (“Puroast”) sues Defendant, Trader Joe’s Company (“Trader Joe’s”), for false advertising in violation of the Lanham Act.

**INTRODUCTION**

1. This is a false advertising case that seeks to expose and stop the sale of coffee that Trader Joe’s has misleadingly been advertising and selling as “low acid.” Testing has confirmed that the coffee being sold by Trader Joe’s as “low acid” contains less than half the caffeine as true coffee. Consumers seeking true low acid coffee are deceived by the false and misleading claim by Trader Joe’s that its product is low acid coffee. Trader Joe’s conduct puts consumers at a heightened level of health risk and allows Trader Joe’s to sell its product at a market premium, all while harming Puroast in its sale of true low acid coffee.

**PARTIES, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE**

2. Puroast is a for-profit corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Florida with its principal address located in Miami-Dade County, Florida, whose products are sold nationwide on Amazon, at more than 450 Publix supermarkets, 2,000 Kroger’s, 110 National

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Grocers and 180 Ralphs and who operates a coffee shop in this District selling an assortment of Puroast beverages and ground and unground Puroast low acid coffee.

3. Trader Joe's is a for-profit corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of California with its principal place of business located in Los Angeles County, California, is registered with the Florida Secretary of State to conduct business in Florida, operates an online store selling its products on a nationwide basis, sells the subject product nationwide on Amazon, and operates at least eight (8) retail stores selling the subject product within this District.

4. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over Puroast's claims brought under the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1051, *et seq.* (specifically, 15 U.S.C. § 1125) pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1337, because the claims arise under the laws of the United States and involve interstate commerce. Specifically, all of the claims in this action arise from Trader Joe's sale of low acid coffee that is not low acid coffee.

5. Venue is proper in this District under 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because: (i) Trader Joe's is subject to personal jurisdiction in this district; (ii) a substantial share of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in this district; (iii) a substantial amount of the falsely advertised coffee at issue was sold and is located in this district; and (iv) Trader Joe's transacts business within this district and has engaged in business activities within this District.

### **LOW-ACID COFFEE**

6. Low acid coffee is any coffee that has a pH level above 5.5 or has at least 50% less acid than regular coffee without any additives or treatments. *See* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low\\_acid\\_coffee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_acid_coffee) (last visited January 30, 2025).

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7. Low acid coffee uses non-treated green coffee beans and does not include any additives. It has a lower concentration of acidic compounds, particularly chlorogenic acids, resulting in a higher pH and less acidic taste compared to regular coffee. *Id.*

8. Studies have revealed that the roasting process can be optimized to produce low-acid coffee while still retaining some level of chlorogenic acids, which have potential health benefits. While extreme roasts can successfully lower coffee acid levels, samples from these extreme roasting levels were almost charred and not drinkable. As a result, commercially brewed coffees typically do not exceed a pH of 5.3, as the taste becomes unacceptable above that threshold. *Id.*

9. In contrast to true low acid coffee, regular coffee is fairly acidic which gives it a bitter taste and can be intolerable or dangerous for consumers with dietary sensitivities to acid.

10. Because of increasing consumer awareness of health and dietary issues with the consumption of regular coffee, there has been a growing trend toward low-acid coffees.

**PUROAST'S TRUE LOW ACID COFFEE**

11. Puroast occupies a unique market position because it has developed its own proprietary roasting methodologies that renders a true low-acid coffee.

12. That proprietary method was inspired by and formulated based traditional roasting techniques observed in coffee-growing regions.

13. This process involves roasting the beans at specific temperatures and durations, which significantly reduces the acidity levels in the final product. The roasting technique transforms chlorogenic acids and chloroquinic acids—compounds responsible for bitterness and

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acidity in coffee—into phenolic compounds known as flavonols. This transformation not only lowers acidity but also enhances the antioxidant properties of the coffee.

14. In this regard, testing has confirmed that Puroast low acid coffee has an average pH of 5.84 (compared to a pH of 5.0 to 5.29 for other commercial brands) and possesses 5.4 times the antioxidant activity compared to other commercial brands.<sup>1</sup>

15. Importantly, Puroast's coffee also retains its full flavor and caffeine content. In other words, it is truly a regular coffee with significantly lower acidity.

16. This makes Puroast unique as other brands that do not have access to Puroast's proprietary roasting technologies and, as a result, they can offer only watered-down, substituted or neutralized beverages that have significant impacted caffeine levels, taste profiles or both.

17. True "low acid" coffee, like that sold by Puroast, has all of the caffeine of regular coffee but much less acidity making it the correct and healthy choice for consumers who are health conscious or who suffer conditions and sensitivities causing them to seek out lower acidity. In addition, true low-acid coffees, such as those sold by Puroast, have smoother, less bitter flavors, making them appealing to consumers who prefer a milder taste without significant diminution in the richness or caffeine content of their coffee.

18. For individuals with acid reflux, IBS, or other digestive concerns, low-acid coffee offers a way to enjoy coffee without adverse effects. Failure to select low-acid coffee, when needed

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<sup>1</sup> The pH scale measures the acidity or alkalinity of a substance. The scale ranges from 0 to 14. Pure water is neutral, with a pH of 7.0. The lower the pH value, the more a substance is acidic. Each whole pH value is ten times stronger than the next outer or more extreme value. For example, a pH of 4 is ten times more acidic than a pH of 5.

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or preferred by a consumer, can result in significant health risks, worsened symptoms (including an exacerbation of acid reflux and heartburn) leading to discomfort and potential complications, prolonged inflammation (for gastritis and ulcer sufferers) or delayed healing due to the irritative properties of the coffee, and the erosion of tooth enamel, increasing tooth sensitivity and susceptibility to cavities.

19. Puroast Coffee contains approximately 70% less acid than traditional coffee blends, making it gentler on the stomach and suitable for individuals prone to acid reflux, heartburn, or other gastrointestinal discomforts.

20. Scientific research has shown that Puroast Coffee boasts seven times more antioxidants than green tea and five times more than other leading coffee brands. These antioxidants play a crucial role in combating inflammation and protecting cells from damage caused by free radicals.

21. Puroast accurately describes its low acid coffee as depicted below:

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**TRADER JOE'S FAKE LOW ACID COFFEE**

22. Trader Joe's cloaks itself in a contrived philosophy based on the appearance of a health-conscious, balanced lifestyle and nutritional transparency in order to cater to consumers who are seeking to pursue such lifestyle goals.

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23. Seeing the growing trend toward low acid coffee, Trader Joe's decided to cash-in on it by offering low acid coffee to consumers that has been steamed to reduce acidity. The steaming process reduces the potency of the coffee, essentially watering it down, and greatly reducing its caffeine content.

24. However, Trader Joe's does not reveal to consumers that its "low acid" coffee is not on par with normal coffee and falsely and misleadingly claims to be real low acid coffee.

25. Instead, as depicted below, Trader Joe's falsely and/or misleadingly labels its product as being regular coffee ("100% Arabica Whole Bean Coffee") and "Low Acid," when it is neither low acid nor regular (fully caffeinated) coffee:



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26. Testing has revealed that these statements are false and/or misleading.
27. Trader Joe's low acid coffee contains less than half the caffeine as normal coffee making it more akin to decaf or half caff coffee than regular coffee.
28. The fact that Trader Joe's is selling decaf or half caff coffee as regular low acid coffee is not revealed to the consumer.



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29. Trader Joe's low acid coffee does not have a pH value above 5.5 which is the threshold for true low acid coffee.

30. The fact that Trader Joe's low acid coffee does not have a pH value above 5.5 is not revealed to the consumer.

31. Trader Joe's has made these false and/or misleading statements (representing decaf or half caff coffee as regular low-acid coffee) to capitalize on several consumer trends without making the investment or changes needed to produce authentic low-acid coffee.

32. By falsely marketing decaf or half caff coffee as low-acid, companies can exploit this niche market without adjusting their sourcing or roasting processes, which can be costly.

33. Producing true low-acid coffee can involve sourcing specific types of beans or using specialized roasting techniques to reduce acidity. Decaffeinated coffee, on the other hand, already has a different taste profile that some companies may find easier to pass off as low-acid, particularly to consumers who aren't well-versed in coffee nuances.

34. Low-acid coffee products often come with premium price tags, and Trader Joe's marketing and sale of decaf coffee as low acid coffee without the extra cost of producing true low acid coffee, results in a much higher profit margin.

35. The mislabeling allows Trader Joe's to price the product as a specialty coffee while cutting corners on production.

36. Puroast and Trader Joe's are competitors in the market for coffee.

37. Trader Joe's conduct as more full alleged herein has harmed, damaged, and continues to harm and damage Puroast and consumers.

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38. On information and belief, Trader Joe's currently sells more than \$59 million worth of its "low acid" coffee product annually.

39. Puroast has retained undersigned counsel to represent it in this matter and is obligated to pay a reasonable attorneys' fee with respect thereto.

40. All conditions precedent to this action, if any, have occurred, have been performed, have been waived, or would have been futile.

**COUNT ONE**  
**(Lanham Act - - False Advertising - - 15 U.S.C. § 1125(a))**

41. Puroast incorporates, as though fully set forth herein, the allegations set forth in paragraphs 1 through 40 above.

42. Trader Joe's is using false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations in commercial advertising and marketing that misrepresent the nature, characteristics, and/or quantities of Trader Joe's low acid coffee.

43. On information and belief, Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations actually deceive or have a tendency to deceive a substantial segment of their audience.

44. Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations are material and are likely to influence the purchasing decisions of actual and prospective purchasers of Trader Joe's low acid coffee and/or Puroast's low acid coffee.

45. Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations affect interstate commerce.

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46. Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations have diverted sales to Trader Joe's at the expense of Puroast and/or have lessened the goodwill enjoyed by Puroast's low acid coffees.

47. Puroast has been injured and/or is likely to be injured as a result of Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations.

48. On information and belief, Trader Joe's acts of false advertising have deceived and unless restrained will continue to deceive the public and have injured and unless restrained will continue to injure Puroast and the public, causing damages to Puroast in an amount to be determined at trial and other irreparable injury to the good will and reputation of Puroast and its low acid coffees.

49. Trader Joe's acts of false advertising are willful, intentional, and egregious and make this an exceptional case within the meaning of 15 U.S.C. § 1117(a).

50. Puroast has no adequate remedy at law to compensate it for all of the damages that have been caused and will continue to be caused by Trader Joe's wrongful acts unless those acts cease immediately.

51. Trader Joe's false, deceptive, and/or misleading descriptions and/or misrepresentations in commercial advertising and marketing that misrepresent the nature, characteristics, and/or quantities of Trader Joe's low acid coffee were material because they were likely to influence purchasing decisions by consumers who relied thereon to inform themselves of the inherent quality or characteristic of the subject product.

52. As a direct result of Trader Joe's actions, Puroast suffered damages.

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53. Under the circumstances, Puroast is entitled to an award of exemplary damages as well as an award of its reasonable attorney's fees and costs incurred in prosecuting this action.

54. Until appropriate injunctive relief is issued requiring Trader Joe's to remove the "low acid" labels from its product and any and all advertising relating thereto, Puroast will continue to suffer damages in an amount to be proven at trial.

**PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, Puroast Coffee Company, Inc., prays that this Court enter judgment in its favor and against Defendant, Trader Joe's Company, awarding the following relief:

1. A permanent injunction requiring Trader Joe's to cease advertising and marketing the subject product as being low acid coffee;
2. The full measure of Puroast's damages, including compensatory, economic, out of pocket, liquidated, unliquidated and otherwise, in an amount to be determined at trial;
3. Disgorgement to Plaintiff of all of Defendant's profits and/or gains of any kind from its acts of false advertising and sales of the subject product;
4. For an award of prejudgment interest on all damages awarded;
5. For an award of Plaintiffs' reasonable attorney's fees and costs incurred herein;
6. Other preliminary and equitable relief as the court determines to be appropriate; and
7. Such other and further relief as the Court deems just and equitable.

DATED: February 14, 2025

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Respectfully Submitted,

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/s/ Matthew L. Lines  
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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

The undersigned hereby certifies that on February 14, 2025, the foregoing was electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system which will send a notice of electronic filing to all counsel of record.

/s/ Matthew L. Lines  
Matthew L. Lines